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RH: Anne Conway and her Circle on Monads

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Anne Conway and her Circle on Monads

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Abstract: The goal of this article is to counter a belief, still widely held in the secondary literature, that Anne Conway espoused a theory of monads. By exploring her views on the divisibility of both bodies and spirits, I argue that monads could not possibly exist in her system. In addition, by offering new evidence about the Latin translation of Conway's *Principles*, and the possible authorship of its annotations, I argue that she never even suggested that there could be such things as monads. Alongside this, I explore the theories of monads that *did* get developed by the philosophers closest to Conway—Henry More, Francis Mercury van Helmont, and Christian Knorr von Rosenroth—thereby further underlining Conway's originality and philosophical daring.

Keywords: Anne Conway, Henry More, Francis Mercury van Helmont, Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, Leibniz, monads, atoms, divisibility, monism, kabbalah, *Kabbala denudata*

1. Introduction

In the steadily growing body of secondary literature on Anne Conway (1631–79), it has frequently been claimed that Conway anticipated, and maybe even influenced, Leibniz's theory of monads. This trend got going with a 1979 article by Carolyn Merchant, entitled

“The Vitalism of Anne Conway: Its Impact on Leibniz’s Concept of the Monad.”¹ It subsequently came to dominate the field; even now, many commenters still just take it for granted that Conway believed in monads. For example, Sarah Hutton’s article on Conway in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2003/2014) not only commits her to the existence of “particles called monads,” but this commitment is considered central enough to her philosophy to make it into the article’s preamble. There are only five sentences there—as it were, the five things that everyone ought to know about Conway—of which the fifth states: “Her concept of the monad, which is indebted to the Kabbalism, anticipates Leibniz.”² Or again, monads make it into the opening paragraph of the preface to Carol Wayne White’s book on Conway (2008), there listed among just *three* things that are supposed to mark her out as distinctive: “Conway’s theory of monads, her attraction and eventual conversion to Quakerism, and her use of the Lurianic Kabbalah in developing her religious cosmology characterize her as an innovative and bold thinker.”³ Others who have followed Merchant’s lead in ascribing a theory of monads to Conway include Peter Loptson (1982), Jane Duran (1989), Lois Frankel (1991), Allison Coudert (1992), Steven Schroeder (2007), Sandrine Parageau (2010), Justin Smith (2016), and Emily Thomas (2017).⁴ Now, there are some (such as Stuart Brown) who have at least argued that Conway’s theory of monads surely did not *influence* Leibniz’s in any serious way.⁵ No doubt. Others (as we will see) have argued that Conway’s theory of monads did at least differ from Leibniz’s in important ways. But I would go further: I contend that Conway did not even *have* a theory of monads. I wholeheartedly agree with White that she was an innovative and bold thinker. But, if anything, that innovation and boldness lay in the very fact that she did *not* believe in monads. In treating even the human soul as infinitely divisible, Conway was not only going against centuries of philosophical tradition and the prevailing viewpoint of her own era, but—as I will show—was even going against the opinions of those closest to her.

To clarify the issue that concerns me, I should distinguish it from one that has animated numerous scholars over recent years, namely, over the nature of Conway's monism about the created world. Was she a type monist, believing that there were many created substances but all alike in kind? Or was she an existence monist, believing that there was just one created substance, with individual creatures subsisting merely as modes thereof? Jessica Gordon-Roth has recently not only given her own take on the issue, but has surveyed pretty much every other contribution to this debate—and there have been many—from previous scholars.⁶ However, my concern is entirely independent of this. Regardless of what created individuals *are*, ontologically speaking, whether substances or modes, one thing that everyone agrees on is that Conway believed that there were many of them—indeed, infinitely many—all distinct from the others in some sense or other. What I intend to show is that none of these creatures should be regarded as a monad in any sense, *and Conway never suggested that they should.*

Before we proceed to that discussion, it might be useful to set the scene by introducing, as it were, our *dramatis personae*—for I intend to discuss monads in relation not only to Conway herself, but also to her wider circle of friends and collaborators. The full story here has been rehearsed enough times that I can be brief.⁷ For present purposes, suffice it to say that Anne, Viscountess Conway, née Finch, was born in Kensington (London) in 1631. At the end of the 1640s, still in her teens, she became acquainted with the Cambridge Platonist, Henry More (1614–87). He recognized her prodigious intellect, and they soon developed what would become a close philosophical engagement and lifelong friendship. Two decades later, in 1670, a second crucial figure entered her life. Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614–98), son of the great Paracelsian iatrochemist, Jan Baptist van Helmont, was called upon to assist with her chronic and debilitating physical ailments. But Conway and the younger van Helmont were evidently so taken with one another that he ended up staying in

her household for the remainder of the decade, until her death in 1679. Conway's esteem for More and van Helmont is clearly demonstrated by the fact that, in her will, they were actually the *only* two figures outside her family who were singled out to receive substantial bequests.⁸ But they were not only her best friends on a personal level: much of her philosophy emerged out of an engagement with theirs, whether embracing their opinions or—certainly in More's case—directly criticizing them in order to chart her own course.

In addition, van Helmont played a crucial role as a go-between between Conway and More and another key figure, Christian Knorr von Rosenroth (1636–89), who corresponded with all three from Germany. Knorr was a prolific translator as well as a philosopher in his own right. Most notably, he was responsible for the enormous (2,500-page!) compilation of kabbalistic texts he published as *Kabbala denudata* in two tripartite volumes, 1677 and 1684. Knorr shared advance manuscript copies of some of these texts with his friends in England—More and van Helmont both ended up contributing discussions thereof to the published collection—and these kabbalistic ideas would come to inform Conway's own philosophy.

On Conway's death, van Helmont found among her papers a notebook in which she had written out her thoughts, probably around 1678.⁹ Van Helmont was eventually able to arrange its publication in Latin as *Principia philosophiae antiquissimae et recentissimae* (1690), or, as the title of the first and all subsequent English translations has it, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy* (1692). (I shall have occasion to say more later about the publication history of this book). Alongside a few surviving letters, this is the sole statement we have of Conway's philosophy. In it, she criticizes Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza, and (though without actually naming him) More. She addresses a number of different metaphysical issues—God, creation, time, free-will etc.—but the thesis that dominates the book is a form of gradual monism whereby all creatures are more or less spiritual, and wholly dead matter is dismissed as chimerical.

2. Monads

What do we actually mean by the term ‘monad’? What is it that I am denying that Conway believed in? In approaching this question, the most natural starting point would be the figure with whom the term is most closely associated: namely, Leibniz.

Leibniz opened his 1714 summary of his metaphysical system, known as *The Monadology*, by defining a monad as a simple substance, without parts, that enters into composites (§1). Everything that existed was either simple or complex. But the simples were prior to the complexes that arose out of their aggregation. Therefore, if there were no simples, there would be nothing at all (§2). And these simples were indivisible: they could not be taken apart, one part separated from another, because they *had* no parts. However, Leibniz also believed that anything extended would thereby be composite and divisible, so he could not treat a monad as extended. Extension, for Leibniz, was merely a well-founded phenomenon, more a matter of how aggregates of monads were represented in perception than how they really were in themselves. Leibnizian monads therefore should not be equated with material atoms, which had traditionally been construed as extended but indivisible. Leibniz did not believe that there were any such things, and replaced them in his own system with the “true atoms of nature” (§3), the monads themselves, which were much more akin to spirits than to anything material. Leibniz regarded all monads as centers of life, equipped with both perception and appetition (§§10–15). Another term he used for these simple substances was ‘entelechies,’ and he even called some of them—those that were lucky enough to be endowed with the higher powers of sensation, memory, and ultimately reason—‘souls’ or ‘minds’ (§§18–19, 29–30).¹⁰

All this, of course, long postdates Conway. But then, Leibniz did not invent the term. Its ultimate roots lay with the ancient Pythagoreans: but they used it to refer to God or The One. More relevantly, the term was in use in Conway's day, now referring to created beings, and in work she knew very well indeed. Henry More, her original mentor and closest friend, had been sharing his writings with her ever since their first acquaintance in the 1640s, and this was a term he had already started using.

More precisely, More used the compound phrase, 'physical monad,' to designate what others called—and what he himself had formerly called—an 'atom.' A commitment to atomism was one of the few constants in the evolution of More's philosophical views, which, on certain other issues, changed quite dramatically over the course of a long career. From his very first philosophical work, *Psuchōdia Platonica* (1642), to the definitive statement of his mature metaphysical system, *Enchiridion metaphysicum* (1671), and even beyond, More repeatedly argued that material bodies could be divided only as far as the level of particles that were—in contrast to Leibnizian monads—extended but nevertheless indivisible. The only thing that changed was the terminology. In 1642, More had concluded his argument in these terms: "So must sleight [i.e. slight] Atoms be sole parts of quantitie."¹¹ In 1671, we instead finding him saying: "By physical monads [*Physicas Monadas*] I understand particles so minute that they cannot be further divided or disperced into parts. Body, however, is composed entirely of these, and can be resolved into the same, at least by divine power."¹²

The terminological shift came in the *Appendix to the Defence of the Philosophick Cabbala*, which More added to the new, expanded edition of *Conjectura Cabalistica* that he included in *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings* (1662). The original 1653 work itself had been directly inspired by More's discourse with the young Anne Conway herself, and we know she took notice when More returned to the project in 1662, because, in 1663, she pressed him to take it still further.¹³ More's goal was to unveil the esoteric meaning,

philosophical and moral as well as literal, lying behind the text of the first three chapters of Genesis. In particular, the immediate context of his introduction of the expression, ‘physical monad,’ was an exploration of the metaphysical insinuations of Genesis 1:1–2: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep.” More believed that the author of Genesis was Moses himself, and moreover (following Renaissance tradition) he regarded Moses as the first proponent of atomism.¹⁴ When More came to consider the formless earth produced on the first day, it was therefore entirely natural that he should suggest that it might be understood as consisting of as yet entirely disconnected atoms. From this homogenous soup, the atoms would then start to coagulate together into the larger—though still microscopic—particles of the three Cartesian elements, first forming the aethereal heavens on the second day, and then later more solid, terrestrial, and ultimately macroscopic bodies. It was in order to suit the character of the *first* day, as distinct from the second, that More adopted the term ‘monad,’ to signal the unity of these particles, in preference to ‘atom,’ which instead connoted their indivisibility. The first day’s work amounted to the production of “actual *perfect Parvitudes* and of nothing else, which are so many *Physical Monads*, and utterly *indivisible* in themselves, as the incorporeal Beings created the First day are, but separable, as they likewise are, one from another; it may unforcedly be referred to the *First* day’s work.”¹⁵

But, terminology aside, the theory itself was the same as More had been defending for twenty years: these particles, although extended, were still essentially indivisible. Or, more precisely, “indiscerpible.” More regarded an extensionless point as a non-entity. “For, to take away all *Extension*, is to reduce a thing only to a Mathematical point, which is nothing else but pure Negation or Non-entity; and there being no *medium* betwixt *extended* and *not-extended*, no more than there is betwixt Entity and Non-entity, it is plain, that if a thing *be* at all, it must be *extended*.”¹⁶ As far as More was concerned, everything that really existed

needed to be extended in some manner or other, and that included each individual atom/physical monad. But being extended meant that it should have, for instance, a left-hand side and a right-hand side. The mind could consider one of these parts separately from any consideration of the other, and that might be regarded as a kind of intellectual division. More's notion of indiscerpibility allowed for this purely mental activity: what it signified was that it was impossible that the thing itself should actually be taken apart in reality. However, he did regard that latter impossibility as being very strict indeed, not just a physical impossibility but a logical one. Most of the atomists in More's era were content to claim merely that no natural force could divide an atom, while still allowing that an omnipotent God could miraculously intervene to do so. More disagreed: "God indeed can annihilate them; but he can by no means divide them, since he hath already divided 'em as long as it was possible for them really to be divided."¹⁷

Leibnizian monads and Morean physical monads therefore differed as far as extension was concerned, the one unextended and the other extended. What they had in common, and the essential feature that defined them both *as* monads, was strict indivisibility/indiscerpibility.

They also differed in that Leibniz regarded monads as perceptive and appetitive, while More regarded physical monads—and the compound bodies that arose through their aggregation—as entirely dead. However, although More did usually preface the word 'monad' with the word 'physical,' one can occasionally find him referring to "a metaphysical monad, that is, a spiritual substance, not exceeding the amplitude of a physical monad."¹⁸ What the use of the term 'monad' connoted in the metaphysical case was merely this minuscule size, compared to other spirits of greater amplitude. The metaphysical monad would already be essentially indiscerpible simply in virtue of being spiritual, for this (in More's opinion) was the character of spirits across the board, distinguishing them from

bodies. But, the source of its indiscerpibility notwithstanding, indiscerpible it certainly still remained.

In addition, the spirituality of a metaphysical monad meant that was alive, endowed with an intrinsic capacity to initiate change as an active cause, rather than just passively serving to communicate effects, which was the most that bodies could do.¹⁹ Morean monads, therefore, came in two varieties. Physical monads were lifeless and wholly passive, whereas metaphysical monads were vital centers of activity, and thereby much closer to Leibnizian monads. Both kinds were extended (albeit minutely so), and in this they did both still differ from Leibniz's. But what all three—Leibniz's monads, More's physical monads, and More's metaphysical monads—had in common, and what was the most fundamental, essential feature of a monad as such, was that they were simple, that is, indivisible in an extremely strong sense, entirely lacking in discerpible parts.

3. Living Beings and Governing Spirits

Leaving the issue of monads to one side for a moment, the wider affinities between Conway's metaphysics and Leibniz's are undeniable. Leibniz was, indeed, one of only a tiny handful of early modern philosophers who actually took notice of Conway's work. He was probably given a copy of the book by their mutual friend, Francis Mercury van Helmont, and we know that he did read it. His own copy still survives, and shows that he underlined certain passages that evidently struck him as noteworthy.²⁰ Moreover, he liked what he found. He mentioned Conway and her work with approval in several letters, and most prominently at the start of the *New Essays*, claiming that he now saw: "How to make sense of those who put life and perception into everything—e.g. of Cardano, Campanella, and (better than them) of the late

Platonist Countess of Conway, and our friend the late M. Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont (though otherwise full of meaningless paradoxes) together with his friend the late Mr Henry More.”²¹ Conway did indeed put life and perception—or at least the capacity for such—into everything. She strongly rejected a dualism of material bodies and immaterial spirits. As far as she was concerned, created reality was a smooth continuum of more or less spiritual beings. Spirits, through sin, could degrade themselves into a more corporeal condition, from which they might eventually hope to restore themselves to a more eminently spiritual one. But, no matter how degraded they might become, some trace of their original spirituality would always remain: she rejected the notion of a *wholly* lifeless body out of hand. “And seeing dead Matter doth not partake of any of the communicable Attributes of God, we must certainly conclude, that the same is a mere *non ens*, or nothing, a false Fiction or Chimaera, and so a thing impossible.”²²

For a more specific example of affinity with Leibniz, one finds both in Conway’s book—at least up to a point—and in the works of their mutual friend, van Helmont, an anticipation of Leibniz’s view that each living thing contains smaller living things within itself, each one with its own dominant monad or governing spirit.

In Leibniz’s case, we find this later in *The Monadology*:

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66. From this we see that there is a world of creatures, of living beings, of animals, of entelechies, of souls in the least part of matter.
67. Each portion of matter can be conceived as a garden full of plants, and as a pond full of fish. But each branch of a plant, each limb of an animal, each drop of its humors, is still another such garden or pond. . . .

70. Thus we see that each living body has a dominant entelechy, which in the animal is the soul; but the limbs of this living body are full of other living beings, plants, animals, each of which also has its entelechy, or its dominant soul. (Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, 222)

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As for van Helmont, he observed:

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we are to take notice, that the fiery Spirit hath many Spirits under its Dominion, which greatly differ from one another in their Efficiency or Operation; many whereof have again their particular Dominion over others, like as in an Army, the *Generalissimo* commands the whole Army; but besides, this every Regiment, Company, &c. have their own Commanders, and subaltern Officers. (Van Helmont, *The Spirit of Diseases*, 56)²³

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And, in Conway, we find the following:

<ext>

every Spirit hath its Body, and every Body its Spirit; and as the Body, *sc.* of a Man or Beast, is nothing else but an innumerable multitude of Bodies, compacted together into one, and disposed into a certain order; so likewise the Spirit of a Man, or Beast, is a certain innumerable multitude of Spirits united together in the said Body, which have their Order and Government so, that there is one Captain, or Chief Governor, another a Lieutenant, and another hath a certain kind of Government under him, and so through the whole, as it is wont to be in an Army of Soldiers; wherefore the Creatures are called Armies, and God the God of

Hosts, as the Devil which possessed the Man was called Legion, because there were many of them; so that every Man; yea, every Creature, consists of many Spirits and Bodies. (Conway, *Principles* (1692), 80/*Principles* (1996), 39 (ch. 6, §11))²⁴

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The militaristic nature of van Helmont and Conway's analogies, something that we do not find in Leibniz, suggests that there was a closer connection between those two than between either one and him. But then, we already know this to be case. Van Helmont shared Conway's home for almost a decade, whereas he was only one among many friends and correspondents for Leibniz. What is less clear is the direction of influence between Conway and van Helmont. Although van Helmont was Conway's senior by some seventeen years, and was already philosophically active before they ever met, the fact remains that this detail did not enter van Helmont's published works until those that postdated his time with her. Who influenced whom is impossible to say. Perhaps it is safest just to regard this as something that arose out of their mutual discourse. But, in any case, this way of unpacking the basic notion of a living being as a microcosm was already there with them, long before Leibniz started to articulate it.

There was, however, a crucial difference, not only between Conway and van Helmont on the one hand and Leibniz on the other, but between Conway and van Helmont themselves. For there are two ways in which this scheme might be unpacked. It could be that there are innumerable spirits, in a hierarchy of ever-diminishing domain and authority, but where each such spirit is an indiscernible unit. Or it could be that there are simply no units, just aggregates within aggregates.

Leibniz certainly embraced the former position and, I contend, so too did van Helmont. For him, each general, captain, commander, or lieutenant was an indivisible,

monadic individual in its own right. (I shall return to van Helmont's position in section 5). As for Conway's handling of this shared hierarchical scheme, that has been discussed by Justin Smith and Marcy Lascano: but, on this particular point, they go different ways. Even if he is not completely explicit about it, Smith certainly appears to favor the former reading for Conway too. He connects Conway's treatment directly with Leibniz's, and the only real difference he finds lies in the fact, as he sees it, that the monads that ground Conway's version of the scheme are to be understood not as Leibnizian 'metaphysical atoms,' but as plain old physical atoms.²⁵ Lascano, however, supports the alternative reading, whereby these nested principal spirits are themselves to be understood as divisible aggregates in their own right.²⁶ In this, I side with Lascano. As the next section will demonstrate, Conway rejected not only physical atoms, but all other kinds of monads properly worthy of the name.

4. Conway's Rejection of Monads

Conway's rejection of atomism is one of the main themes of chapter 3 of her book. In her opinion, an infinitely powerful, good, and bountiful God would be such as to create a universe that was itself infinite, not only outwardly to the infinitely large, but also inwardly to the infinity small.²⁷ In particular, all bodies—or rather, all of those things commonly *called* 'bodies,' bearing in mind that Conway did not regard anything as purely corporeal—would be infinitely divisible. "I say the least Particle of Body, or Matter so called, may be always divided into parts less, *ad infinitum*; so that no actual division can be made in any Matter, which is not always farther divisible, or capable to be divided into less parts, and that without end."²⁸

This was tantamount at least to a rejection of More's *physical* monads, that having been just another term for atoms, the extended but indiscernible particles of matter that (in More's opinion) imposed a finite limit on the possibility of real division. Moreover, although Conway was not going to embarrass her best friend by actually naming him, it is abundantly clear that she had More *directly* in her sights in this discussion. (The same is true of much of the rest of the book too: it can be read in large part as a critical commentary on More's philosophy.²⁹⁾ To see that More was the target of Conway's criticism here, one needs only to compare their respective texts. When Conway was casting about for an argument for atomism, in order to refute it, she hit on a decidedly idiosyncratic one that More had been presenting consistently from *Psychōdia Platonica* (1642) to *Enchiridion metaphysicum* (1671). More precisely, she used the version he had given in the Preface to *The Immortality of the Soul* (1659).

In §3 of that Preface, More presented his argument in syllogistic form:

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That which is actually divisible so far as actual division any way can be made, is divisible into parts *indiscernible*.

But *Matter* (I mean that *Integral* or *Compound* Matter) is actually divisible as far as actual division any way can be made. (More, *The Immortality of the Soul*, iii (Preface §3), in *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings*)

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In §9 of Conway's chapter 3, we find this argument, offered for the purpose of refutation:

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That which is actually divisible, so far as an actual division can any ways be made, is divisible into parts indiscernible; but Matter or Body (to wit, that Matter that is entire or compound) is actually divisible so far as an actual division can any ways be made, therefore, &c. (Conway, *Principles* (1692), 24/*Principles* (1996), 18–19 (ch. 3, §9))

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This is part of why, in this article, I am favoring the 1692 English version of Conway's text over the 1996 Coudert and Corse translation. The 1692 version is not without its faults, and of course its English is somewhat archaic. Nevertheless, it is generally more accurate to the original 1690 Latin. Coudert and Corse were instead working from Loptson's 1982 version of the Latin. But that is riddled with misprints, including ones that do actually change the sense of certain passages, and these are faithfully reproduced in their English. Even where (as here) their source material has at least been correct, their version is still (as Parageau observes) more an adaptation than a translation, and their wording also makes it harder to recognize references that Conway herself was making to other texts.³⁰ This is one such instance: the Coudert and Corse translation loses the Morean resonance that is, however, plainly evident here.

For it should be borne in mind that this text has passed through four different hands. First, More composed it in the late 1650s. Second, Conway borrowed More's argument for her notebook in the late 1670s. Third, Conway's 1690 translator (on whom, more later) put this into Latin. Finally, the 1690 Latin was put back into English in 1692; and yet the end product still remains almost identical, not just with its proximate source but with its ultimate one. There are some slight changes. The Latin expands More's "Matter" (or "Materia" in his own Latin *Opera* of 1679) to "Materia sive corpus," which the English then retains as "Matter or Body." But this, and the other little differences (e.g. "can any ways be made" for

“any way can be made”) just go to show that neither translator was referring back to More’s original, but was simply working from what was actually there on the page. In short, even though Conway’s original manuscript sadly no longer seems to exist, we have abundant reason to believe that the 1690 Latin version and even the 1692 English version can generally be relied upon as faithful records of what she herself must actually have written. If they are so close to her *source* here, this suggests that they are likely to be equally close to her own more original remarks elsewhere too.

As for More’s argument itself, at the heart of it was the principle that a God whose power is actually infinite ought to be able to bring any process to completion, even if it should involve infinitely many steps. In modern parlance, an omnipotent God ought to be able to perform a supertask. So let us suppose that body is infinitely divisible, but also that God has completed the process of dividing it as far as it can be divided, such that all of these infinitely many potential divisions have been brought to actuality. If the parts thereby generated are individually unextended—and quite aside from the fact that More regarded an unextended mathematical point as a non-entity—the problem is that this will turn out not to have been a case of division after all, but rather the annihilation of the bulk we started with. Although More was happy to allow that God could indeed annihilate that bulk, this would certainly take more than just shifting the parts around, separating each from its neighbors. So these ultimate parts must each be extended. But then we will have our atoms/physical monads: extended particles that are, however, indiscernible, that is, indivisible even by God (because, if he could have divided them further, he would already have done so, that process now being supposed complete). Moreover, if these particles are infinite in number, then their respective extensions will add up to an infinite bulk, whereas the extension we started with was only finitely large. So More ultimately concluded that they must not only be extended and indiscernible, but finite in number. That is, it turned out that the process of dividing a

body “so far as actual division any way can be made” only involved finitely many steps after all, the extension of each individual atom measuring that finite proportion of the whole.³¹

In her critique of this argument, Conway took issue with More’s use of the phrase “actually divisible.” Not unreasonably, she complained that the term “actually” connoted something that had already been accomplished, while “divisible” connoted precisely the opposite: something that had not yet been accomplished, but could be. She tried reading the argument in these two different ways, either in terms of an actual *division* or in terms of a potential *divisibility*. But what she found was that the minor premise failed on the former reading, and the major premise failed—or rather, became an empty tautology—on the latter. To More’s contention that God would be capable of completing the process of dividing a body as far as division could in any way be made, even if that process should be infinite, she declined—much as Descartes had done, when discussing the very same issues with More himself—to “determine, what the Absolute Power of God will do or can do; as some do vainly and grossly dispute.”³² But she insisted that at least no created power could ever exhaust the possibility of division. And she maintained that this was enough to establish her own conclusion, that matter was infinitely divisible. Given that God does not work on matter directly, but only in cooperation with his creatures, she argued that what actually happens in the world is still constrained by the impotence of the latter, rather than being left to the free exercise of the omnipotence of the former.³³

But the argument itself, and Conway’s critique thereof, are not really the issue. The important thing to take away is merely the conclusion: not just that Conway did not believe in indivisible atoms in general but, more specifically, that she did not believe in Morean physical monads. If that particular expression does not appear in her discussion (which actually it *sort of* does: but I shall come to that), this can just be put down to the fact that it also does not appear in the specific book she was using as her immediate source for More’s

opinions. Conway was here drawing on a work from 1659, whereas the phrase only entered More's lexicon in 1662. But, the jargon notwithstanding, the fact remains that she was arguing directly against the father of so-called physical monads, rejecting the same argument that he would later explicitly go on to use to establish the existence of atoms under that new name itself.

However, the fact that Conway rejected Morean physical monads is not enough to establish the stronger claim that she rejected monads as such. After all, Leibniz himself rejected physical atoms in favor of the infinite divisibility of material things. If Leibniz could nevertheless still find a place for monads in his system, then perhaps Conway could do so too. For instance, what about More's *metaphysical* monads? More definitely did not construe those as termini to the possible division of bodies. For him, they were spiritual beings, really distinct from both macroscopic bodies and their smallest atomic parts. Might Conway have at least been able to find a place for indiscernible units on the spiritual side of the fence?

The answer is no. But then, this should come as no great surprise, given that her central claim throughout the book was that there was no essential difference between body and spirit. Some creatures, for her, were more tenuous and more active (but might degrade themselves through sin into a more corporeal state). Others were gross and sluggish (but might yet be elevated to a more eminently spiritual state once more). But, fundamentally, they were all of a kind: as far as their essences were concerned, what went for one creature went equally for another. And so, if bodies were infinitely divisible, then one should naturally expect the same to hold for spirits too. This is indeed what we find.

The passage quoted above, about the microcosm contained within each living being, already suggests this, by saying that "the Spirit of a Man, or Beast, is a certain innumerable multitude of Spirits united together." The common opinion was that each person contained only one soul, and Conway was clearly denying *that*. However, reading that passage from a

Leibnizian perspective, perhaps this multitude could still be understood as a multitude of monadic individuals. Even if a person should be understood as involving an aggregate of many distinct spiritual parts, as well as many corporeal parts, each of at least the former parts might yet be individually indivisible, one *simple* central spirit to dominate the whole, another to play the role of each captain, another each lieutenant, and so on.

But that this was not Conway's position is demonstrated by a remark she made some forty pages later in the book. That comment about the hierarchy of spirits within the whole man or beast appears at the end of chapter 6. But Conway returned to the theme at the end of chapter 7, with much water passing under the bridge between the two discussions. And she now offered an all-important clarification—and an extremely radical claim in its own right—regarding the nature of that one governing spirit itself, or of the holders of the individual offices beneath it: "But if it be said, ought not the Central or governing Spirit to be but one only Atom; for otherwise how can it be called a Centre, and the chief Spirit, having Dominion over the rest? I Answer in the Negative: For this Centre it self, or chief, and governing Spirit, is manifold [*multiplex*], for the Reasons before alledged."³⁴ For Conway, regardless of whether we are considering its more corporeal or its more spiritual parts—bearing in mind, again, that the difference between the two is only one of degree, not of kind—a human being is an aggregate of aggregates, all the way down, the spiritual parts just as infinitely divisible as the corporeal ones. Even the human soul is not a simple substance. Rather, it is explicitly "*multiplex*," that is, manifold or complex.

This being so, one might wonder how this central spirit could ever hope to operate in a coherent, unanimous way to govern those under its dominion. Why should it be called "one" governing Spirit at all? Conway proceeded to explain: "the unity of the Spirits that compose or make up this Centre, or governing Spirit, is more firm and tenacious, than that of all the other Spirits; . . . Hence it comes to pass that the Soul of every Man shall remain an

entire everlasting Soul, or be of endless duration, that it may receive the proper Fruit of its labour, and that the Universal Law of Justice (which is written on every Thing) doth require, which is as a most strong and indissolvable Band to preserve this Unity.”³⁵ The plurality of spirits that collectively constitute the central governor for the whole person might be—or might eventually become—so firmly united to one another that they will never again be separated. Nevertheless, what unites them will be a bond of sympathy, love, and mutual support, not of essence. Perhaps no natural force could ever divide them. Perhaps not even God *would* ever do so, because this would require him to violate of his own law of justice, something he would never do. But would God nevertheless still retain the *power* to divide them? It would seem so, precisely because they were manifold, each one not only really distinct from each of the others, but also containing a further multiplicity of really distinct parts within itself.

In the wider discussion under consideration here in §4 of chapter 7, as part of her demonstration that the difference between spirit and body was only one of degree, not of essence, Conway’s immediate target was More’s contention that such an essential difference lay in the fact that body was discerpible and impenetrable while spirit was indiscerpible and penetrable (as well as being respectively passive and active, which she tackled elsewhere). Consequently—so as to have all bases covered—in addition to claiming that spirit was in fact just as discerpible as body, she also claimed that there was a certain sense in which body might be construed as being just as indiscerpible as spirit. Having already done much the same for penetrability and impenetrability earlier in the section, her ultimate conclusion was “that Impenetrability and Indiscerpibility, are not more Essential Attributes of Body, than of Spirit; because in one sence they agree unto either, in another sence unto neither.”³⁶ So in what sense might a body be construed as indiscerpible? As should come as no surprise, given this equivalence between body and spirit, the bond that tied the parts of a body together was

the very same power of sympathy: “when the Body is divided, or torn asunder, and the Members removed one from another unto a certain distance, so long as these Members are not corrupted, and changed into another *Species*, they still send certain subtile Particles one to another, and to the Body from whence they came, and the Body sends the like unto them, (which we call Spirits, and Bodies, or Spirits, for they are either,) by means whereof the Parts and Members so apparently separated, still retain a certain real Unity and Sympathy.”³⁷ She proceeded to cite a couple of examples, such as the celebrated case where the sixteenth-century Italian surgeon, Gaspare Tagliacozzi, had attempted to graft a new nose onto a patient, fashioned from the flesh of another. All went well until, thirteen months later, the donor happened to die. At that same moment, though now in a different country, the recipient found that his nose suddenly began to grow cold and putrefied, until eventually—as Samuel Butler memorably put it in *Hudibras*—“off dropt the sympathetic snout.”³⁸

Such sympathetic interactions notwithstanding, however, Conway certainly did still regard all bodies—and equally spirits—as infinitely divisible or discerpible in the more normal sense of the term, meaning simply that their parts could suffer spatial separation. The whole point about sympathy was that it could act *at a distance*, in this case continuing to unite the nose with the donor despite their lack of spatial union. Indeed, Conway explicitly tied her account of sympathetic union directly to her account of the infinite divisibility of things. It was precisely *because* things could emit a constant flow of particles from themselves, smaller and smaller ones, even to infinity, that they could remain sympathetically united to things at ever greater distances throughout the whole infinitely large universe.³⁹

For Conway, then, no created thing, whether body or spirit, was truly indivisible. In contrast to Leibnizian monads, Conway’s spirits were not simple substances: they were explicitly manifold. But likewise—and perhaps more to the point—they cannot be equated with Morean monads either. Whether physical or metaphysical, More’s monads were

indiscernible, such that not even the omnipotent power of God could spatially separate their purely notional parts. Conway had no place for any such things.

Of course, scholars have not been blind to Conway's opinions about the infinite divisibility of all created things. Even among those who have ascribed a theory of monads to her, there have been some who have sought to reconcile the two doctrines simply by treating Conway's monads as divisible. Loptson, for instance, identifies this divisibility as a distinguishing feature of her monadology to set it apart from Leibniz's.⁴⁰ Parageau commits Conway not only to monads but to atoms, even to the point of casting about for possible sources of inspiration for her atomism in Boyle, Charleton or Gassendi, or alternatively in the Lurianic kabbalah or the monadology of Bruno or van Helmont. And yet she too rightly recognizes Conway's views on infinite divisibility, her solution to this tension being simply to treat Conway's atoms as whatever happen to be the smallest parts of creatures, without any suggestion that they could not yet be made even smaller through division.⁴¹ Others who make similar suggestions include Frankel and White.⁴²

Now, there is no reason whatsoever why Conway *could* not have made such a move. She was certainly under no obligation to adhere to Leibniz's conception of the monad, given that Leibniz had not even started to articulate it when she was writing her book. Even in the case of More, although she might have rejected *his* conception of a monad (whether physical or metaphysical), that does not mean that she could not yet have had *her own* conception thereof. Authors should be perfectly free to take an old term and use it in a new way.

Indeed, entire linguistic communities will frequently do this, quite happily. When Ernest Rutherford and his colleagues first split the atom, the reaction was not to complain that this was incoherent on etymological grounds. Rather, the term (originally from the Greek 'atomos,' or 'indivisible') simply took on a new sense. And so likewise, Conway could have given a new sense to the term 'monad.' She might, for instance, have said that spirits—and

perhaps some bodies too—should indeed be regarded as monads, but in virtue of this weaker kind of unity, a bond of love and sympathy so strong that it would never be dissolved, making them indivisible in the natural order of things while nevertheless allowing that they might yet be discernible in principle.

The fact is, however, that she did not do this. Conway simply *did not use* the term ‘monad’ anywhere in her book, or, for that matter, in her extant letters. She knew perfectly well what it meant, because she had read More. But—perhaps precisely because she did not believe that anything like *that* really existed in the world—she did not use the term. Now, this might come as a surprise to some readers, who think they have found at least one instance where she did precisely this, and seemingly in a positive way, affirming the existence of such things. The passage in question, therefore, will definitely need to be considered: that will be the topic of the next section.

5. Van Helmont, Knorr, and the Annotations

If, as I have suggested, Conway did not postulate “particles called monads,” then why have so many people thought she did? It all comes down to just one single passage, the only place in the book where the word appears at all. My contention is that these are not Conway’s words. *Someone else* might have used the term in her book, but she did not.

The passage in question appears in §9 of chapter 3. Immediately after Conway’s critique of More’s 1659 argument for atomism, and her own contrary claim that bodies can always be divided into ever-smaller parts ad infinitum, we find the following words in brackets:

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[Mathematical Division of Things, is never made in *Minima*; but Things may be Physically divided into their least parts; as when Concrete Matter is so far divided that it departs into Physical *Monades* [*monades Physicas*], as it was in the first State of its Materiality.

Concerning the Production of Matter, see *Kab. denud.* Tom. 1. Part 2. pag. 310. following; and Tom. 2. the last Tract, pag. 28. Numb. 4, 5. then it is again fit to resume its Activity, and become a Spirit, as it happens in our Meats.] (Conway, *Principles* (1692), 28/*Principles* (1996) 20 (ch. 3, §9))

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These words have, more often than not, been treated as Conway's own, for example by Schroeder or Smith.⁴³ Even Jacqueline Broad, who is perfectly well aware of—indeed, emphasizes—Conway's rejection of atomism and her insistence on the infinite divisibility of both bodies and spirits, is happy to quote this passage in that context, without acknowledging either that these might not be her words or (bearing in mind the connotations of that specifically Morean expression, 'physical monad') that they are in direct tension with that very doctrine.⁴⁴ Or again, in the very article that launched the trend to portray Conway as a precursor of Leibniz, Carolyn Merchant not only takes these words to be Conway's, but expressly chides the nineteenth-century German scholars, Heinrich Ritter and Ludwig Stein, for attributing them to van Helmont.⁴⁵

Now, where Merchant is certainly right is in correcting Ritter's mistaken assumption that van Helmont wrote the entire book. If nothing else, and doctrinal agreements notwithstanding, the style is quite different. However, the fact that van Helmont did not write *all* of it does not entail that he did not write *any* of it. In the case of this particular comment, other scholars (such as Loptson or Parageau) have acknowledged that van Helmont "may

perhaps" have added it to Conway's text, while some (such as Tristan Dagron) have more unequivocally attributed it to him, treating it as an editorial interpolation into a larger work by Conway herself.⁴⁶ For my part, I am less convinced than Dagron that van Helmont's was the hand behind this passage—although it might have been—but I absolutely agree with him that these are *not* Conway's own words.

To help identify the most likely author of this passage, whether van Helmont or someone else, it might be worth going into a little more detail about the publishing history of Conway's treatise. Two forewords were prepared for it, probably both by van Helmont, a longer one that went unused until Richard Ward included it alongside a sketch of Conway's life in his *Life of Henry More* (1710), and a shorter one that appeared with the book itself. According to the former, Conway's work was "abruptly and scatterdly, I may add also obscurely, written in a Paper-Book, with a Black-lead Pen, towards the latter end of her long and tedious Pains and Sickness."⁴⁷ The latter adds that it was written "in a very dull and small Character; which being found after her Death is partly transcribed (for the rest could scarcely be read) and published in *Latin*."⁴⁸

It has sometimes been suggested that both More and van Helmont were involved in the eventual publication of this work.⁴⁹ And it looks like the project did *initially* involve More as well as van Helmont, for it was among More's papers that the longer preface was preserved, hence Ward's access to it in 1710. However, he was phased out of the project long before it finally reached fruition, by which time he was already three years in his grave anyway. Van Helmont moved back to the Continent, while More remained in Cambridge, and the former evidently took the manuscript with him, finally publishing it in Amsterdam in the Latin translation of 1690. In the years between Conway's death in 1679 and that 1690 publication, Knorr published the second volume of *Kabbala denudata* in 1684, More died in 1687, and Knorr himself died in 1689. The 1690 first edition was followed in 1692 by an

English edition, published in London. But the original paper-book had evidently already been lost or discarded in the interim, or at any rate was not available to the London printers, because the 1692 edition was just an English re-translation of the Latin translation of Conway's original English. The English version is signed "J.C. Medicinae Professor," who was almost certainly the same "J. Clark, M.D." who translated van Helmont's *Seder Olam* in 1694.

It has likewise been suggested that van Helmont—perhaps in conjunction with More—did the Latin translation himself. This seems unlikely. He was not much of a one for writing at the best of times, preferring to work through ghost-writers even when it came to his own works: see note 23 above. How much less would he have relished the prospect of drudgingly ploughing through someone else's text, no matter how fond he might have been of its author? His Latin was—by the standards of the time—decidedly weak anyway, and probably not up to the task. As luck would have it, however, van Helmont had a friend he could call upon, someone who was an exceptionally gifted linguist and a mind-bogglingly prolific translator: namely, Christian Knorr von Rosenroth.

And there was precedent here. Back in 1677, Knorr and van Helmont had collaborated in producing an abridged Latin translation of More's *Immortality of the Soul*, the one acting as translator, the other as publisher.⁵⁰ But in fact there is an even closer link between Knorr and the 1690 Amsterdam edition. When Conway's treatise did finally appear, it was as part of a larger volume of *Opuscula philosophica*, accompanied by two other works. One of these required no translation, having been originally composed in Latin: *Philosophia vulgaris refutata*, attributed to Jean Gironnet. The other, however, was another English work: *Two Hundred Queries concerning the Revolution of Humane Souls*, which had been published in London in 1684. The author was none other than van Helmont himself, with the assistance of his and Conway's Quaker friend, George Keith, and the content arose directly

out of the discussions the three had held together during the 1670s.⁵¹ But there is solid evidence that Knorr was responsible for the Latin translation of at least this work.

In early 1688, Leibniz visited Knorr and made notes on their discussions. In particular, Leibniz recorded that Knorr “has translated from English certain questions concerning the preexistence of souls, which contains opinions he does not accept.”⁵² Although Leibniz did not specify a number, it seems all but certain that those questions must have been the *Two Hundred Queries*. It was a bold and unusual move to press for the pre-existence or (to adopt the kabbalistic term, translated directly from the Hebrew *gilgul*) revolution of human souls and, of the small handful of English works that were published on the theme during this period, this really is the only one that would fit the bill. Although Knorr did not live to see the *Opuscula philosophica* reach print, dying in 1689, if he had already translated one of its constituent works from English to Latin by 1688, there is no reason why he could not have handled the other one too in the time he had left. Although the evidence still remains only circumstantial, I suggest—as far as I know, for the first time—that it is, at any rate, plausible that the translator of Conway’s book from English to Latin should have been Christian Knorr von Rosenroth.

The reason why this issue is worth considering is because it might have implications for the authorship of this passage about physical monads, and of the other, similar annotations, scattered throughout the book. When the Latin edition appeared, it contained several such remarks, nearly always demarcated from Conway’s own text by means of both italics and parentheses, and, more often than not, citing specific discussions in *Kabbala denudata*. But several of these annotations cannot possibly have been by Conway, making it unlikely—given their uniformity—that any of them were.

There are two principal grounds for this claim. One is the simple, chronological fact that several of the passages—including this one—cite the 1684 second volume of *Kabbala*

denudata. The first volume of Knorr's collection appeared in 1677, meaning that Conway herself could perfectly well have referred to those texts, several of which were, in any case, already circulating between her and her friends before they made it into print. But the second volume postdated her death by a full five years. Not only could she not possibly have specified the page numbers we find in some of these italicized notes, but it is unlikely that all of the texts themselves could have been ready even in manuscript during her lifetime. If they had been, then why would Knorr have simply sat on them for five years, rather than going to print earlier?

But the other, no less compelling reason why these annotations cannot have been by Conway is because several of them are directly contradicting (explicitly or implicitly) what she herself was saying, or at any rate gently correcting her supposed mistakes and overstatements. The note at issue here is a case in point, for it simply does not cohere with what she herself had just been arguing in the immediately preceding remarks. It is important to observe that the term it uses for the least parts of things is not simply 'monad,' but rather the more precise and idiosyncratically Morean 'physical monad' (as matter was on the "First day" or in its "first State," and into which it could "be resolved" or "depart" even now, according to More and the annotator respectively—see above). That is to say, a material atom. But that is the very thing that Conway had just been rejecting, devoting several pages to a detailed critique of More's own argument for such indiscernible particles of matter.

But there are other cases too. For example, when Conway defines the distinction between body and spirit in terms of their respective degrees of subtlety, her annotator ventures to explain how spirit is "rather defined"—or, as in the Coudert and Corse translation, and here more accurately to the Latin, "better defined [*melius definitur*]"—referring the reader to Knorr's *Adumbratio Kabbalae Christianae* for further details.⁵³ Or, when Conway claims that there are infinitely many creatures, the annotator cites the Dutch-

Marrano kabbalist, Abraham Cohen de Herrera (c. 1570–c. 1635), and observes that “Creatures are rather [i.e. better, *melius*] termed Indefinite than Infinite.”⁵⁴ Or again, when she argues for an infinity of past times, the annotator observes that “the *Hebrews* seem to speak somewhat different from this.”⁵⁵ But he then proceeds to cite a couple of kabbalistic sources (from Herrera and Hayyim Vital (1542–1620)) that turn out not merely to be somewhat different, but in fact to say the very opposite, both explicitly asserting a finite past.⁵⁶ (In this regard, however, it is worth noting that both van Helmont and Knorr—whose *Adumbratio* is also cited in the same note, in a valiant attempt to reconcile the two positions—sided not with the kabbalists on this, but with Conway.⁵⁷ Although all three certainly did draw, to a greater or lesser degree, on the Lurianic ideas of Herrera, Vital, and their ilk, they did not swallow them whole).

If Conway did not write these notes, and if More did not write them either—for he would have even more strongly rejected most of what they actually say, the mention of “physical monads” notwithstanding—then who did? It might indeed have been van Helmont, the publisher of the volume; that certainly remains possible. However, if I am correct that Knorr might have been the translator, then he could equally well have been responsible for these insertions too. After all, they do reference his own *Adumbratio* several times. And who would be in a better position to cite specific passages, scattered right across the 2,500 pages of *Kabbala denudata*, than the person who compiled it in the first place?

Returning to the specific annotation at issue here, the one about physical monads, if one follows up the *Kabbala denudata* citations it offers, one finds that actually neither of them is referring to the original Jewish kabbalists. Rather, the authors of the two texts in question are—wouldn’t you just know it?—none other than van Helmont and Knorr themselves.

“*Kab. denud.* Tom. 1. Part 2. pag. 310 following” refers to *Ad Fundamenta cabbalae aëto-paedo-melissaeae dialogus*, van Helmont’s response to Henry More’s critique of kabbalist metaphysics, “The Foundations of the Philosophy or Cabbala of the Eagle-Boy-Bee,” which immediately preceded it in the same volume of *Kabbala denudata*.⁵⁸ In the English translation of van Helmont’s text, published in 1682 as *A Cabballistical Dialogue*, the key passage reads as follows: “after that a *Spirit* is immediately *Created*, it doth for certain assignable Causes, and which are elsewhere to be remembered, descend into that state of *Death*, that it admitteth of the *Qualities* and name of matter, being now a natural *Monade* or *single Being*, and a very *Atome*: then *out of* these a further *mediate Creation* may be made and done, even as out of a Dead *Sinner*, a *New Creature* is made by and through the *Messiah*.⁵⁹ The words “or single being” were a gloss added by the translator. In perhaps the most crucial phrase, “a natural *Monade* or *single Being*, and a very *Atome*,” the original Latin reads: “monas physica & atomus,” that is, a physical monad and atom. This is important, because it shows just close van Helmont’s terminology was to More’s, using not just the word ‘monad’ but the more peculiarly Morean ‘physical monad’—not ‘natural monad’—and explicitly identifying this with an atom.

In another work, *Paradoxal Discourses*, van Helmont—or, rather, his ghost-writer *du jour*, one “J.B.”—set aside that Morean neologism, and reverted more exclusively to the familiar language of atoms. In the first part, concerning “the Macrocosme: or, Great World,” van Helmont adopted the kabbalistic term, ‘revolution’ (*gilgul*), to describe the same fall and rise of creatures in general, and he took care to insist that “not the least atome . . . be forgotten or shut out” from this process.⁶⁰ In the second part, concerning “the Microcosme: or, Man, as being the Little World,” he described the ‘Spiritual Bodies’ in a man and, returning to the image of man as an army that we already discussed in section 3, he asked: “Must not also finally those Spirits (as a great and well ordered Army under their Captain

General, or *Adonai Zebaoth*) and every least Atome, after they have wrought out their revolution, return to man again, and unite themselves with his Central Spirit, and so all these Spirits being united with the Central Spirit, make up the whole man?”⁶¹ *Adonai Zebaoth* was a common expression in the Hebrew Old Testament, meaning ‘Lord of hosts’: compare the Conway passage quoted in section 3 above. As I noted in that section, the fact that these spirits—or spiritual bodies—were innumerable did not by itself exclude the possibility that each one by itself might yet be an indiscernible unit or monad. I have argued that they were not so for Conway, but they certainly were for Leibniz. And van Helmont? Although—unlike, say, More—van Helmont never really sought to *prove* that these fundamental particles were indivisible, the fact that he was happy to adopt the jargon of ‘physical monads’ and ‘atoms,’ and explicitly to fit such beings into this scheme of degeneration and restoration under both names, clearly suggests that his inclination lay more in the direction of Leibniz’s position than Conway’s.

As already noted, Conway herself did not use the language of ‘physical monads’ at all. But, when it came to ‘atoms,’ she was explicit in §4 of chapter 7 that, even supposing that such things could exist in the first place—which she had already disproved in chapter 3—their very nature *as atoms* would be such as to *exclude* them from that scheme:

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For (*ex. gr.*) let us suppose but one Atom to be separated from its Fellow-Creatures, What can that do to perfect it self, or make it self greater or better? What can it see, hear, taste, or feel, either from within or without? . . . And seeing this is but one Atom or Centre, certainly it cannot have any Motion within it self . . . and consequently, seeing it cannot hear, see, taste, or feel, *ab intra*, or, *from within*, it cannot have it from other Creatures, *ab extra*, or, *from*

without . . . because it is an Atom, and an Atom is so small that it can receive nothing within it. (Conway, *Principles* (1692), 119–20/*Principles* (1996), 54 (ch. 7, §4))

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But then, she had insisted in §1 of the same chapter that every creature must at length return unto good.⁶² And she elaborated in §2 that an infinitely good God would never produce any dead thing, inconvertible to any degree of life or knowledge.⁶³ Here, then, was *another* reason why atoms or physical monads could not exist: God would never permit the existence of any creature that could not aspire to progress towards perfection, but this was something that an atom could never do.⁶⁴

In short, van Helmont both believed in the existence of atoms and physical monads, *and* believed that they could participate in the fall and rise of all creatures. Conway, by contrast, rejected their existence, *and* maintained that, even if they were to exist, their nature would be such as to exclude them from that process. In this, Conway was striking out on her own. If the annotation that we have been considering, with its reference to physical monads, has masked this fact, perhaps that might be because the note was actually written by van Helmont.

Or, equally well, perhaps because it was actually written by Knorr: for that other citation in this annotation, namely “Tom. 2 the last Tract, pag. 28. Numb. 4, 5,” refers to Knorr’s own *Adumbratio*. In §4 (of chapter 5), Knorr described creation as having “the nature of beings that are material monads [*monades materiales*], and from whose combination the material world was created.” In §5, he proceeded to explain:

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However, just as it is said of these fallen vessels that, because in the act of falling, they would be in their own light, which is intelligence and love, therefore, the material monads still have access to it, partly to their own light (by which, if they are aroused in a certain way, they are again able to emit rays that extend to inanimate material and seminal forms, like plants and brutes), and partly at least to the tendency towards irradiation. . . . This pertains to your doctrine about the elevation of sparks from that nourishment, from which it is also possible to derive the complete fundamentals of physics and medicine, as well as the secrets of chemistry, whose peculiarities demand their own treatment. (“Van Helmont,” *Sketch of Christian Kabbalism*, 81/KD 2.3:28)

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Knorr added in §6 that “it is said that matter in itself consists of individual monads that are at least a point. Although they are deprived of self-motion, they are still prone towards the capacity of light and irradiation.”⁶⁵

Once again, then, we see the suggestion that matter is really a mass of fallen spirits, but that these can still aspire—if not by self-motion, perhaps, then at least by being aroused from without—to being restored into a more spiritual state of “irradiation.” Such an interchange between matter and spirit was, indeed, one of the fundamental theses that More had been endeavoring to overturn in the tract to which van Helmont’s *Ad Fundamenta* had been a direct response. More’s opinion was that matter as such was created out of nothing, and that what was ever inanimate would forever thus remain. But this notion of an initial fall of spirits into a corporeal state, followed by a gradual re-ascent into renewed spirituality and perfection, for a truly *universal* salvation, was common currency between all three of van Helmont, Knorr, and Conway. The difference among those three, however, was that not only van Helmont but also Knorr explicitly included physical monads and atoms in this fall and

rise—precisely as this annotation itself does, with its claim that matter can escape this monadic state to “resume its Activity, and become a Spirit” once more—whereas Conway excluded them, both from this particular scheme and (in part, on that very basis) from reality itself.

Knorr’s reference to the kabbalists’ “doctrine about the elevation of sparks” also echoes another of the parenthetical, italicized annotations in Conway’s book. Immediately after that passage about how a man or beast contains an innumerable multitude of spirits, hierarchically arranged by rank as in an army, we find the following: “(many of these Spirits which exist in Man) are called by the *Hebrews*, *Nizzozoth*, or *Sparks*. See in *Kabbal. denud.* Tom. 2. Part 2. Tract. *de revolutionibus animarum*, Cap. 2. & seq. p. 256, 268, &c.)”⁶⁶ The tract cited here was *Sefer ha-Gilgulim* by Hayyim Vital (although attributed in *Kabbala denudata* to his teacher, Isaac Luria). And the same text is also cited later in the *Adumbratio* itself, in relation to the same theory of “souls, which are called *Nizuzot*, that is, points, or rays.” In that later section, Knorr again refers to monads: but now no longer to ‘material monads,’ but indeed to “physical monads [*monadibus physicis*].”⁶⁷ If it is accepted that the author of the *Adumbratio* itself was Knorr rather than van Helmont—on which, see the Appendix below—perhaps this is further circumstantial evidence that he was behind the annotations too.

To sum up, if we discount this one annotation about how things “may be Physically divided into their least parts; as when Concrete Matter is so far divided that it departs into Physical *Monades*,” the term simply does not appear in Conway’s book. She *never claimed* that there were such things as monads, and the claims she did make plainly rule out their very possibility, as much in the spiritual case as in the physical. Creatures, for her, did not *have* any ultimate “least” parts into which to be divided: they were infinitely divisible. But, as Conway knew perfectly well, to be indivisible—or, as More liked to say, ‘indiscerpible’—

was the most central, essential feature of a monad. Moreover, it was in the case of physical monads that this was most explicitly true. That compound phrase, the very phrase that appears in this annotation, was of More's own devising, and it was *defined* by him in these terms. But, as we have also seen, when Conway sought to establish the infinite divisibility of matter, it was precisely by criticizing More's own argument for the contrary, atomist position. So it is not enough to suggest that Conway merely gave her own new sense to the term 'monad,' such that Conway's monads only really differed from others by being complex where they were simple, as if that was some kind of accidental and easily dispensable feature thereof. The simple fact is that Conway did not believe in monads, *and she never claimed that she did.*

If nothing else, the fact that Conway's annotator (whoever that might have been, whether van Helmont, Knorr, or someone else again) was disagreeing with her on this point—and on others too—should give us all the more confidence in the integrity of her own text. Even though her original English notebook has been lost, and there might have been a certain amount of editorial intervention to deal with those parts that "could scarcely be read," it does appear that her editor or translator was scrupulously holding back from silently altering those parts of the text where he happened to disagree, reserving any such corrections to clearly demarcated annotations.

But, more than that, we also have here an illustration of just how single-minded a thinker Anne Conway actually was. As I noted at the outset, in denying the simplicity of the human soul, she was not only going against centuries of philosophical tradition: she was going against those nearest and dearest to her. Not only was Conway prepared to disagree with her oldest friend and original philosophical mentor, Henry More, but she was not slavishly following the doctrines of her new kabbalistic friends either, van Helmont and Knorr. She was going to make up her own mind.

Appendix: The Authorship of *Adumbratio Kabbala Christianae*

Adumbratio Kabbala Christianae is a treatise that was frequently (though not always) included with the second volume of *Kabbala denudata*, constituting that volume's third and final part. In section 5, I claimed that this work was by Christian Knorr von Rosenroth, and this will have implications for the identification of the author of the annotations to Conway's book. But this attribution deserves a few words of explanation and defense, because the work has instead generally tended to be attributed to Francis Mercury van Helmont. Such authorities as Gershom Scholem, Allison Coudert, and Sarah Hutton have all accepted this attribution.⁶⁸ Sheila Spector has even gone so far as to publish her recent English translation of the work under van Helmont's name, without any acknowledgement that the attribution might even be open to dispute.

However, none of these scholars has ever offered any actual evidence or argument to back up this attribution, and it has indeed been disputed, not least in a scathing review of Spector's work by Saverio Campanini. Campanini points, for instance, to the fact that the text quotes the New Testament systematically in Syriac, suggesting Knorr rather than van Helmont as the more likely author.⁶⁹ Anna Maria Vileno has suggested that the work might be the product of a collaboration between the two of them, and this cannot be ruled out.⁷⁰ However, I contend that whatever contribution van Helmont might have made will still have been under Knorr as principal author. For, even before we get to the internal evidence raised by Campanini, there are two main problems with the van Helmont attribution.

First, and apparently unbeknownst to Spector, part of this work was published separately at the time. It originated in a short Latin tract of 1672, entitled *Dissertatio*

*singularis de existentia animarum.*⁷¹ Aside from its opening chapter, the bulk of the *Dissertatio* found itself repeated verbatim—though with very substantial additions—in chapter 7 of the *Adumbratio*. Admittedly, the 1672 version was just as anonymous as the *Adumbratio* itself would be in 1684. However, also in 1684, an English version of the former appeared, and there it was *not* anonymous. According to its title page, *A Dissertation concerning the Pre-existency of Souls* was “Originally written in the Latine Tongue, several years since, by the Learned *C.P.* and now made English by *D.F. D.P.* upon the recommendation of *F.M.H.* their Friend.” Evidently F.M. van Helmont did have a hand in its publication. As for “*D.F. D.P.*,” that will have been Daniel Foote, Doctor of Physick, one of van Helmont’s regular collaborators. But what about the author himself? The ‘*C.*’ would certainly fit for ‘Christian’: but why should it read ‘*C.P.*,’ rather than ‘*C.K.R.*’? The answer is that Knorr had a pen-name, ‘Peganus,’ as used consistently by Henry More in his letters to Conway. Knorr’s German translation of Thomas Browne’s *Pseudoxia epidemica* (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1680) was issued under the name ‘Christian Peganus,’ and Vileno and Robert Crocker both contend that the ‘*C.P.*’ of the 1684 *Dissertation* should indeed be unpacked as ‘Christianus Peganus.’⁷² I agree.

But, second, we need not stop there. Lest this unpacking of the initials ‘*C.P.*’ should still seem merely speculative, we turn to John Locke. Now, Locke knew van Helmont personally: “Our old Friend,” as Benjamin Furly described him in a 1691 letter to Locke.⁷³ He was also aware, at least, of Knorr: it is not clear whether they ever actually met in person, but Knorr did at least communicate to Locke some (heavily kabbalistic) observations on the *Abregé* of his *Essay* in 1688.⁷⁴ So Locke would surely have been in a position to know, when he inscribed his own copy of the *Adumbratio* itself with the words “per Authore Christiano Knor von Rosenrod.”⁷⁵

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¹ Carolyn Merchant, “Vitalism,” reprinted with modifications in Merchant, *Death of Nature*, 253–68.

² Sarah Hutton, “Lady Anne Conway,” unpaginated. See also Hutton and Breteau, “Anne Conway critique d’Henry More,” 372, 374; Hutton, “More, Conway and the Kabbalah,” 35, 37–38 (together with 42n42); Hutton, *Anne Conway*, 176, 222.

³ Carol Wayne White, *Legacy*, ix. See also 50, 52, 84.

⁴ Peter Loptson in Anne Conway, *Principles* (1982), 3, 34–35 and 35n38; Jane Duran, “Anne, Viscountess Conway,” 64–67, 69; Lois Frankel, “Anne Finch, Viscountess Conway,” 42–43; Allison Coudert, “Henry More, the Kabbalah, and the Quakers,” 37 with 61n35, 45; Steven Schroeder, “Anne Conway’s Place,” 94–96; Sandrine Parageau, *Les ruses de l’ignorance*, 144, 216–18, 222; Justin Smith, “Conway and Monadology,” throughout; Emily Thomas, “Tine, space and process,” 992, 995, 1006.

⁵ Stuart Brown, “Leibniz and More’s Cabalistic Circle,” 83–85.

⁶ Jessica Gordon-Roth, “What Kind of Monist is Anne Finch Conway?” For an alternative perspective, see Thomas, “Anne Conway as a Priority Monist: A Reply to Gordon-Roth.”

⁷ Full details may be found in Marjorie Nicolson, *Conway Letters*, and Hutton, *Anne Conway*.

⁸ Nicolson, *Conway Letters*, 480–81.

⁹ Conway discusses Spinoza’s pantheism, as presented for the first time in his *Opera posthumata* which, although officially dated 1677, did not actually start to circulate until the beginning of 1678. More composed his own *Confutatio* of it that same year and, given that Conway died in February 1679, she cannot have composed her critique much later.

¹⁰ Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays*, 213–17.

¹¹ More, *Psychathanasia*, 21–22, at 21 (Book 1, Canto 2, stanzas 53–58, at 56), in his *Psuchōdia Platonica*.

¹² More, *Manual of Metaphysics*, 1:71–72 (ch. 9, §§1–3, at §3).

¹³ See Nicolson, *Conway Letters*, 74–75, 82, 83, 92, 217, 218, 220, 221.

¹⁴ See Danton Sailor, “Moses and Atomism,” especially 10–11.

¹⁵ More, *Conjectura Cabalistica*, 189–91, at 190 (*Appendix to the Defence*, ch. 9, §§2–4, at §2), in his *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings*.

¹⁶ More, *The Immortality of the Soul*, iii (Preface, §3), in *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings*.

¹⁷ More, *The Immortality of the Soul*, xv (Preface, §3, Note).

¹⁸ More, *Manual of Metaphysics*, 1:112 (ch. 27, §14).

¹⁹ In full, More’s account of the distinction between bodies and spirits was threefold. Bodies were essentially discerpible, impenetrable, and passive, whereas spirits were essentially indiscerpible, penetrable, and active. For full details, see Reid, *The Metaphysics of Henry More*, ch. 6.

²⁰ Anne Becco, “Leibniz et van Helmont,” 124–25 and 125n5.

²¹ Leibniz, *New Essays on Human Understanding*, 72.

²² Conway, *Principles* (1692), 96 (ch. 7, §2). A new translation and edition of Conway’s text is currently in preparation, by Andrew Arlig, Christia Mercer, Jasper Reid, and Laurynas Adomaitis. In the interim, however—for reasons that I shall discuss shortly—I still favor and will here be using the original 1692 translation over that of Coudert and Corse (*Principles* (1996), here 45–46). For ease of reference, however, I will continue to provide page references to both.

²³ Another, similar passage may be found in van Helmont’s *Divine Being*, 167. We will have occasion later, to mention a third such passage: *Paradoxal Discourses*, second part, 8. It should

be noted that van Helmont actually wrote very little by his own hand, preferring to operate through a sequence of ghost-writers: Paulus Buchius, George Keith, Daniel Foote, “J.B.,” and (as argued by Becco in “Leibniz et van Helmont”) even Leibniz himself. Nevertheless, the close doctrinal consistency across these Helmontian works, not to mention their cross-references to one another, suggests that the opinions were all originating from a single source. So too does the fact that van Helmont’s ghost-writers would often disclaim the works, even as van Helmont claimed them for himself. For instance, Buchius was so incensed when van Helmont published the *Divine Being* without his consent that it led to a falling out between them (detailed in Locke, *Correspondence*, 5:95, 6:720–21). As Keith observed, when similarly disavowing the *Two Hundred Queries* in which he had been involved, “many do write for others that whereof they are not the Authors” (*Truth and Innocency*, 3). His various *writers* notwithstanding, we can still treat van Helmont as the *author* of all these works.

²⁴ See also 118/53 (ch. 7, §4). For the biblical story of Legion, see Mark 5:9 or Luke 8:30.

²⁵ Smith, “Anne Conway and Monadology,” 8–12.

²⁶ Lascano: “Bodies in the Spiritual World,” 330–33; Lascano, “Anne Conway on Liberty,” 173.

²⁷ Conway, *Principles* (1692), 17–21/*Principles* (1996), 16–17 (ch. 3, §§4–6).

²⁸ Conway, *Principles* (1692), 27/*Principles* (1996), 20 (ch. 3, §9).

²⁹ Concerning the book’s engagement with More’s metaphysics, see Hutton and Breteau, “Anne Conway critique d’Henry More.” Concerning its engagement with More’s critique of the kabbalah, see Hutton, “More, Conway and the Kabbalah.”

³⁰ Parageau, *Les ruses de l’ignorance*, 14–15.

³¹ For the argument in full, see More, *The Immortality of the Soul*, iii–iv and xiv–xv in conjunction with 16–21 (Preface §3 with its Note, and Book 1, ch. 6), in *A Collection of Several Philosophical Writings*. For discussion, see Reid, *The Metaphysics of Henry More*, 44–51.

³² Conway, *Principles* (1692), 27/*Principles* (1996), 20 (ch. 3, §9). Compare Descartes, *Correspondence*, 363–64 (Descartes to More, 5 February 1649).

³³ Conway, *Principles* (1692), 24–28/*Principles* (1996), 18–20 (ch. 3, §9).

³⁴ Conway, *Principles* (1692), 122–23/*Principles* (1996), 55 (ch. 7, §4).

³⁵ Conway, *Principles* (1692), 123–24/*Principles* (1996), 55 (ch. 7, §4).

³⁶ Conway, *Principles* (1692), 118/*Principles* (1996), 53 (ch. 7, §4).

³⁷ Conway, *Principles* (1692), 116/*Principles* (1996), 52–53 (ch. 7, §4).

³⁸ Butler, *Hudibras*, Part 1, Canto 1, line 286. Conway, *Principles* (1692), 117/*Principles* (1996), 53 (ch. 7, §4). Concerning the notion of sympathy in Conway, and in early modern philosophy more widely, see Christia Mercer, “Seventeenth-Century Universal Sympathy” and “Anne Conway’s Metaphysics of Sympathy.” Also Karen Detlefsen, “Cavendish and Conway on the individual human mind,” 145–46.

³⁹ *Principles* (1692), 29/*Principles* (1996), 20 (ch. 3, §10); compare 115–18/52–53 (ch. 7, §4). On the infinite largeness of the universe, see *Principles* (1692), 17–21/*Principles* (1996), 16–17 (ch. 3, §§4–6).

⁴⁰ Loptson in Conway, *Principles* (1982), 35.

⁴¹ Parageau, *Les ruses de l’ignorance*, 144, 216–18, 222.

⁴² Frankel, “Anne Finch, Viscountess Conway,” 43; White, *Legacy*, 52.

⁴³ Schroeder, “Anne Conway’s Place,” 91; Smith, “Anne Conway and Monadology,” 8.

⁴⁴ Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century*, 71, 74, 76–77, and (in particular) 83–84.

⁴⁵ Merchant, “Vitalism,” 266 and 266n85; 257 and 257n9. See also 268.

⁴⁶ Loptson in Conway, *Principles* (1982), 34; Parageau, *Les ruses de l’ignorance*, 217; Tristan Dagron, *Toland et Leibniz*, 303–304, and see 292–93 and 293n1.

⁴⁷ Conway, *Principles* (1996), 3.

⁴⁸ Conway, *Principles* (1692), A2v/*Principles* (1996), 7.

⁴⁹ For example, Gordon-Roth, “What Kind of Monist is Anne Finch Conway,” 292; Broad, *Women Philosophers of the Seventeenth Century*, 68–69.

⁵⁰ More, Henry, *Tractatus de anima, ejusque facultatibus et naturali immortalitate* (Rotterdam, 1677). The epistle was signed “F.M.A.H.,” i.e. (in Latin) Franciscus Mercurius ab Helmont. On the identification of Knorr as the translator, see Nicolson, *Conway Letters*, 359–60, 373, 374, along with 323n5. This abridgment, incidentally, omits the atomist argument that Conway borrowed from the 1659 English original, so unfortunately we cannot compare the rendering of her 1690 Latin translator with how Knorr might have rendered it here.

⁵¹ See van Helmont, *Paradoxal Discourses*, second part, 159. On this work, see Hutton, *Anne Conway*, 206–12; Coudert, *Impact*, 244–46; and note 23 above.

⁵² Quoted in Coudert, *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*, 46.

⁵³ Conway, *Principles* (1692), 112–13/*Principles* (1996), 51 (ch. 7, §4). On this attribution of the *Adumbratio* to Knorr, see the Appendix below.

⁵⁴ Conway, *Principles* (1692), 19 (ch. 3, §4). Inexplicably, the Coudert and Corse translation simply omits this sentence: compare *Principles* (1996), 17 and 17n1. For the cited passage, see Herrera, *Gate of Heaven*, 95–99, 140–43/Knorr von Rosenroth, *KD* 1.3:18–22, 64–68.

⁵⁵ Conway, *Principles* (1692), 13/*Principles* (1996), 14 (ch. 2, §5).

⁵⁶ Vital, *The Tree of Life*, 5–7; Herrera, *Gate of Heaven*, 158–65/KD 1.2:29–30; 1.3:68–71.

⁵⁷ For Knorr, see “van Helmont,” *Sketch of Christian Kabbalism*, 95, 97/KD 2.3:35–36. Given that this attribution to van Helmont is incorrect—see the Appendix below—see rather *Seder Olam*, 6, for his own opinion.

⁵⁸ On this exchange, see Coudert, “A Cambridge Platonist’s Kabbalist Nightmare,” and Hutton, “More, Conway and the Kabbalah.”

⁵⁹ Van Helmont, *A Cabbalistical Dialogue*, 13. For the original Latin, see *KD* 1.2:311. See also pages 4, 9/1.2:309–10.

⁶⁰ Van Helmont, *Paradoxal Discourses*, first part, 58–59.

⁶¹ Van Helmont, *Paradoxal Discourses*, second part, 8.

⁶² Conway, *Principles* (1692), 87/*Principles* (1996), 43 (ch. 7, §1).

⁶³ Conway, *Principles* (1692), 93/*Principles* (1996), 44–45 (ch. 7, §2).

⁶⁴ As observed by Broad, “Conway and Charleton,” 582–83.

⁶⁵ “Van Helmont,” *Sketch of Christian Kabbalism*, 83/*KD* 2.3:29.

⁶⁶ Conway, *Principles* (1692), 80–81/*Principles* (1996), 39 (ch. 6, §11).

⁶⁷ “Van Helmont,” *Sketch of Christian Kabbalism*, 95/*KD* 2.3:35.

⁶⁸ Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 200, 417; Coudert, *Impact*, 109, 113, 201, 278; Hutton, *Anne Conway*, 205 and 205n5.

⁶⁹ Saverio Campanini, “Review of Spector.”

⁷⁰ Anna Maria Vileno, *L’ombre de la kabbale*, 132–35.

⁷¹ Reprinted and attributed to Knorr in the journal of the Knorr von Rosenroth Society, *Morgen-Glantz*, 19 (2009) 453–504. I thank Sarah Hutton for pointing this out to me.

⁷² Robert Crocker, *Henry More*, 123n21; Vileno, *L’ombre de la kabbale*, 169–70.

⁷³ Locke, *Correspondence*, 4:206.

⁷⁴ Locke, *Correspondence*, 3:399–405.

⁷⁵ See Victor Nuovo, *Christianity, Antiquity, and Enlightenment*, 133–34, at 133.

⁷⁶ Most of the Helmontian works were published either anonymously or under the name of his ghost-writer: see note 23 above.

⁷⁷ See the Appendix on the authorship of this work.